Plattform Privatheit

Research for a Self-Determined Life in the Digital World

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Press Release

Deepfakes: How can citizens be better protected?

The Collien Fernandes case has sparked a wide-ranging social and political debate on deepfakes. A 'Platform Privacy' project is now investigating the extent to which citizens in Germany are affected by this, the extent to which they are protected by legislation and other measures – and where improvements need to be made in the fight against deepfakes.

For years, researchers have been warning about deepfakes; now, unfortunately, they have become an integral part of everyday life and social media: AI-generated or manipulated image, audio and video content that imitates people, places or events and, due to its now high technical quality, can hardly be recognized as a forgery anymore. Deepfakes range from prank calls, in which the voice of a relative is imitated by AI to trick the recipient into making a payment, to sexualized deepfakes, in which women and minors are 'undressed' using AI or edited into pornographic film scene

Protecting society and individuals from deepfakes

"For a long time, political deepfakes were the focus of academic and political debates as a threat to democracy. However, the dangers to individuals posed by sexualized, defamatory and fraudulent deepfakes have also increased significantly. Sexualized deepfakes, which primarily affect women, not only have devastating individual consequences but can also lead to women withdrawing from political discourse. This severely undermines their equality in society. At the same time, it threatens democracy when large sections of the population no longer participate in the political formation of opinion and decision-making out of shame or fear," says Maria Pawelec, a political scientist at the International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences (IZEW) at the University of Tübingen.

Deepfake Action Kit as a resource for those affected

In practice, measures tailored to specific target groups and easily understandable support services play a key role for those potentially affected. Dana Mahr, a researcher at the Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS) at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), emphasizes the importance of actively involving those affected, for example through citizen science approaches, in order to jointly develop proactive strategies. Jutta Jahnel, a technology impact researcher at ITAS, explains the data collection process: "In moderated discussions, we aim to capture the experiences, fears and expectations of those affected, so that we can then work with them to develop practical approaches for dealing with deepfake threats."

Protecting citizens' rights and fundamental freedoms

From a legal perspective, too, there is a need for action: new and user-friendly technological tools, combined with inadequate enforcement of the law, lower the barriers to entry for perpetrators, which encourages further violations of the law. “Numerous rights are intended to protect citizens from deepfakes,” states Christian Geminn, a legal scholar at the University of Kassel. “However, their practical enforcement often faces significant obstacles. Legislation and legal practice must, however, be in harmony in order to safeguard trust in the legal system, which is an essential pre-requisite for our social coexistence.”

Building a knowledge base in the fight against malicious deepfakes

Murat Karaboga, project manager and political scientist at Fraunhofer ISI, explains the aim of DEEP-PRISMA: “For the first time, we will be conducting a comprehensive, representative study in Germany on the impact of deepfakes. In doing so, we aim to create a knowledge base for informed action in the fight against harmful deepfakes. Only by identifying where deepfakes are currently causing problems and why legal and other protective measures are not providing sufficient relief can we formulate recommendations for better protection against malicious deepfakes.”

DEEP-PRISMA is an interdisciplinary research project run by the Privacy Platform and stands for and stands for “Protecting citizens’ privacy and other rights against misuse by deepfakes”.

Please direct press enquiries to:

Head of Science Communications ‘Platform Privacy’
Barbara Ferrarese, M.A.
Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research ISI
New Technologies Department
+49 151 724 25939
barbara.ferrarese@isi.fraunhofer.de

“Platform for Privacy and Self-Determined Living in the Digital World”

https://www.plattform-privatheit.de/
Bluesky: plattformprivat.bsky.social
Mastodon: @ForumPrivatheit@bawü.social
LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/plattform-privatheit

“DEEP-PRISMA” project members

Maria Pawelec, M.A
University of Tübingen
International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences (IZEW)

PD Dr. Christian Geminn
University of Kassel
Public Law, IT Law and Environmental Law

Dr. Jutta Jahnel & Dr. Dana Mahr
Karlsruhe Institute of Technology Institute for Technology
Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS)

Dr. Murat Karaboga
Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research (ISI)
New Technologies Department

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